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WORLD'S NEWS DAILY

DEFORESTATION AND THE ANNUAL FLOOD LOSSES

National Prodigality in Lumbering Now Bringing Dire Consequences to the Entire Country.

(Advertiser Correspondence. Copyright by Frederic J. Haskin.)

The recent devastation of cities and farms by the waters of the Ohio, Missouri, Red and Kaw rivers places more vividly before us the fact that the people of the United States lose by flood each year an average of \$100,000,000. A few weeks ago the 12,000 inhabitants of Armourdale, in Kansas City's packing house district, had to abandon their homes as the water backed in. Down the valley of the Big Sioux 100,000 acres of farm land were laid waste the early part of June. Cedar City, Missouri, saw its population move out en masse when the Missouri River left its banks on June 14. Two-thirds of the bottom lands within sight of Jefferson City were under water, with wheat fields swamped in from six to eighteen inches of water—a million dollars loss to farmers. The usually harmless little Shunganunga surrounded Topeka with water on June 13, and wrought havoc next only to that of the flood of 1903.

The Columbia, encouraged by heavy rains and melting snows in its headwaters, rose until the pumping station of Wenatchee, Washington, was carried away, and lumber interests were greatly threatened. At Emporia, Kansas, the Neosho, and its tributary, the Cottonwood, brought the worst flood that section has experienced. The far northwestern flood plain suffered most. Continued rain and snow of early June days set the rivers and creeks rushing from their banks, telephone and telegraph communications were cut off and trains on the Northern Pacific were tied up for ten days. Anaconda, Butte and Helena were cut off from the rest of the world, until the old time pony express was revived to meet the situation. Mines in that region were closed and business operations in the city suspended. At Missoula a giant mill was injured to the extent of \$50,000 or more, and communication with Spokane cut off for days.

And so on through the list of floods that have recently swept a wide area of the country in the West, the lowlands of Arkansas and Texas, the valleys of the Ohio and of the rivers on the Atlantic slope. In the trail of each overflow has come loss of property in the shape of crops, homes and stock, and sometimes loss of life. In the trail of all has come a greater and a more abiding loss in the shape of eroded mountain and hill-sides, corroded river banks and silt choked river beds. And greatest of all has come the great waste of water that rushes unimpeded toward the seas, depriving the earth of the moisture it needs for the summer and fall crops, defrauding the rivers of the water necessary to maintain that even current and depth throughout the years, so necessary to the support of that great traffic which the nation hopes to see on her inland waterways.

And the deplorable thing about it, the thing which is a sad commentary on our national thrift and intelligence, is that the greater part of this great waste and incalculable loss is our own fault. The headwaters of these overflowing rivers lie among the mountains which in the beginning of things a wise Creator set with forests that were designed to conserve the winter snows and vernal rains, and then release them later through underground springs and rivulets to the thirsty valleys below. The river courses lay through plains set with trees and undergrowth that would hold the water from an overflow and keep it safe in the sponge of fallen leaves, the roots, and old logs, until such a time as the winds or the soil asked it again.

Man, in his misguided idea of prosperity, is denuding the slopes of their trees as rapidly as human and mechanical agency can effect it, and when the snows and heavy rain-water find no abiding places as in olden days, and rush down the valleys to bring death and destruction in their wake, this same man sits and wonders at the dispensation of a Providence that will so interfere with his material prosperity and happiness. As the first settler of the country, the white man began the work of deforestation as a protection to his home from Indian ambush, and as a means of acquiring tillable land. Later he did it to acquire needed building material, fuel, etc.

In the three centuries of his progress as an axe-man and path-maker for commerce, he has in his ignorance increased the flood evil from a practically negligible volume to its present startling strength. With Old World lessons in flooded areas below naked hills fresh in his mind, he has nevertheless proved little better than his Indian neighbors. It was the Indian who first deprived America of part of her forests. Science tells us that the great prairies of the West were once forest lands, from which the prehistoric American burned the vegetation when gathering nuts, destroying trees on countless acres through countless centuries. At the foot of the Appalachians the flames paused, because the vegetation was damper there and less easy to destroy. With the increase in floods comes the yearly increase in danger to the riparian cities of the nation. The earliest cities were naturally built on waterways to secure the needed transportation facilities. Eighteen of Illinois' twenty-one biggest cities are on rivers; fifteen of Indiana's eighteen biggest ones; nearly all the leading ones of Missouri; and two-thirds of those of Pennsylvania, hold the floods and redeem his country.

Over half the population of Iowa is riparian, and in Ohio there are not over a half dozen big cities in the uplands. Of 355 cities lying below the "fall line" of eastern rivers between New England and the 100th Meridian, 204, with an aggregate population of about 6,000,000 are river towns. All these cities, through their churches, pray weekly for deliverance from war, pestilence, fire, flood and famine; and through the exercise of modern invention and discovery have proved their ability to successfully combat all but one. The flood problem has not been met and grows bigger every year.

Dwellers in these river towns and in the valleys have learned to expect a flood at periods of three, five, or, at most, ten years. The more intelligent, those who have really awakened to the gravity of the situation, are asking government aid in defending themselves against these floods. They ask for great storage reservoirs at the headwaters of the principal rivers, where the surplus from thaws and spring rains can be held and sent down the rivers later, or, in the West, diverted to the irrigation projects. They ask for the building of levees and cut-offs on flood plains as a temporary measure, but above all they are asking for a preservation of the forests on mountain and hill, and a careful reforestation of all denuded slopes.

The total area of the watershed of the Mississippi is 1,250,000 square miles, and during great floods it discharges 2,000,000 cubic feet of water every second. It carries an alluvial deposit that has formed new land from forty feet deep at Omaha to 300 feet deep below New Orleans, covering 80,000 square miles, a surface the size of the state of Montana, with an average of 170 feet of alluvial soil, and using material stolen, unchallenged, from hills and farm lands. The yearly decrease of the habitable part of the whole earth is reckoned at 3,500 square miles. It goes to the seas in the form of silt and much of it can be charged to man's carelessness.

Floods come from early spring rains falling on frozen ground, from the forming of sudden ice gorges in streams, from unusual local rainfalls, from landslides, and like phenomena, but the usual ones come from the lack of means for holding the early spring waters on the mountain sides. The floods of the Missouri and Mississippi usually last longest, sometimes from January to July, because of the slow advance of the sun over the widely diversified headwaters. Those of the Ohio, "the most terrible on the earth's surface," are usually precipitated suddenly by the releasing of all the snows at once in the headwaters which lie parallel to the equator. The water released, forms a volume 100 feet high, 600 feet wide and 300 feet long, to be hurled suddenly at civilization.

Last spring the loss caused by the Ohio floods aggregated over \$100,000,000, about one-fifth of the sum that Congress would have to appropriate to purchase the whole Appalachian system of river headwaters, and establish enough reservoirs to hold the spring surplus, and protect billions of dollars worth of property indefinitely. The Geological Survey shows that the flow of 1,950 square miles, or thirty-five per cent. of the drainage area of the Monongahela can be stored, and released in dry weather to increase the depth of the channel six feet, and incidentally protect Pittsburgh. Forestation there and on other watersheds of the East, would cause a storage of from four to six inches more water annually. A minimum of 2,800,000 horse power is developed in these headwaters every year, and, according to the Geological Survey, fifty per cent. or more is available for economic uses and would bring a rental of \$25,000,000. By storing the spring floods and releasing them for deepening the water in the river, enormous sums for dredging and improving river beds would be saved. The government has spent \$30,000,000 improving the rivers of the Appalachian system and is spending \$56,000,000 more, expecting to increase the 15,000,000 tons of freight shipped annually over water routes to a much greater amount.

Floods bear a direct relation to business depression, and the relation to human suffering, property loss and spread of disease is vital. During the 1907 spring flood, 100,000 working people in Pittsburgh were rendered idle for an average period of a week, and many were homeless. The floods of 1847, 1852 and 1853 were followed down the Mississippi Valley by cholera and other epidemics. In the spring of 1903, the 2,000,000 acres of land were laid waste in the West and \$40,000,000 worth of property destroyed. In 1901 and again in 1902, the southern Appalachian district lost \$10,000,000. In 1883, the loss to Cincinnati alone was \$1,500,000 and the Mississippi Valley suffered to the extent of \$30,000,000. The flood of 1897 cost the valley \$15,000,000, while the flood in the Monongahela Valley cost Western Pennsylvania \$1,000,000. The lesson of the Old World is before us. Southern Europe and Asia are as skeletons of former selves, for each nation in turn has given its forests to misguided civilizers. Northern Africa, once having a climate of our Gulf States, is now ninety-five per cent. sterile. Greece is becoming more barren. Sicily is typhus-infested, France had been damaged to the extent of untold millions before she undertook to deforest her hills. The Rhone, the Po, the Adige, the Ebro, the Guadalquivir, and the Maritza, localities where floods were almost unknown in the world's dim dawn, now annually threaten to depopulate their valleys. Storage reservoirs have recently been tried by various European countries to conserve the flood waters, but all, with the United States, will eventually be driven to the plan of Mehmet Ali of Abyssinia who set out 15,000,000 trees on his barren hills over half a century ago to hold the floods and redeem his country.

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